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ABSTRACT

The two-year Early Childhood Training Course for Bedouin Educators is designed to provide Bedouin teachers for Bedouin kindergarten children. The course was developed to alleviate problems arising from a situation in which Bedouin kindergarten children were taught by non-Bedouins who did not understand Bedouin dialect, who were unfamiliar with Bedouin customs and habits, who were in the Negev because they were required to be and not because they were committed to educating Bedouin children, and who left as soon as they had fulfilled their two-year obligation. Although inception of the course for Bedouin educators involved many problems--not the least of which was the reluctance of Bedouin fathers to allow their daughters to take the course--the course has met with considerable success and has implications which go beyond the immediate issue of kindergarten instruction. (Author/RH)

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# THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAINING COURSE FOR BEDOUIN EDUCATORS

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For Bedouin kindergarten children to be taught by Bedouin teachers who share their language and dialect, customs and habits, who are motivated to educate Bedouin children, and who are committed to remaining in the region is a legitimate and sound educational goal. The two-year Early Childhood Training Course for Bedouin Educators now in progress has attempted to provide a temporary realization of that goal. The course was developed to alleviate these problems which arose from a situation in which Bedouin Kindergarten children were taught by non-Bedouins who did not understand Bedouin dialect, who were unfamiliar with Bedouin customs and habits, who were in the Negev because they were required to be and not because they were committed to educating Bedouin children, and who left as soon as they had fulfilled their two-year obligation. Although there were many problems at the beginning in getting the course for Bedouin educators started - not the least of which was the reluctance of Bedouin fathers to allow their daughters to take the course - the course has met with considerable success and has implications which go beyond the immediate issue of kindergarten instruction.

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## THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAINING COURSE FOR BEDOUIN EDUCATORS

Before I speak about the early childhood training course for Bedouin educators, I want to tell you how and why this special course was established.

The first Bedouin kindergarten was begun only six years ago in Tel-Sheva, a modern Bedouin village near Beer-Sheva with equipment provided by the Education office. The education laws had to be explained to the Bedouin parents and they had to be persuaded that kindergarten education was important.

Since then, more and more school directors have requested the Education office to institute kindergarten in their districts. Today, there are twenty-one kindergarten classrooms throughout the Northern Negev from El-Huzzeil near Kibbutz Shuval to Tel Kassif near Arad, a few miles from the Dead Sea.

Because the children live long distances from the schools, their main transportation are little donkeys. At the schools, the donkeys can be seen patiently waiting in their special parking areas until the children are ready to go home. Some children arrive in family cars. However, I have not seen around the school a single camel, the desert ship which is slowly disappearing from this area's landscape.

The extent to which the kindergarten has won a place in the parents' minds as a preparation for future success in school is evidenced by the growing number of Bedouin kindergartens every year. Because of parental expectations, I put special emphasis on intellectual development so that the parents would be convinced that sending their children to kindergarten was useful and profitable.

It was not easy because Bedouin children had never gone to kindergarten before. Nor had they had the opportunities to manipulate, to play, and to achieve the various levels of development that children usually do in their earlier years. The Bedouin children had to jump immediately, into their chronological age group.

In our monthly meetings and individually, the teachers and I tried to find ways to fulfill the children's needs. We gave an important place to didactive games and task accomplishment. I asked the teachers to send home every piece of finished work and those teachers that did told me that the children were very proud when their parents complimented them on their progress.

I also asked the teachers to build the educational program around the Bedouin environment, the Bedouin nature, their habitations, their customs, their animals. To that end, I encouraged them to make home visits (it is not the custom of Bedouin mothers to come to school). I advised them to arrange the doll corner as a Bedouin living room, with carpets and pillows, and to dress the dolls in the beautiful Bedouin embroidered dresses, so that the children would identify themselves with that corner. The children were very excited about the doll corner which reminded them of their homes: before they entered the doll corner, they took off their shoes as they did in their own homes. The satisfaction the teachers saw on the children's faces gave them the feedback they needed and the strength to continue to work in the Negev far away from their own homes.

The teachers were and some of them still are modern Arabian young ladies from the Galilee and so-called "triangle villages." They were sent by the

Education office to work in the Bedouin section of the Negev after they graduated as a condition of their receiving work later on as educators in their home villages. In addition to the problems all young new teachers face, these Arabian young ladies were homesick. Also, they did not know the Bedouin dialect, so, at the beginning, the children did not understand them and they did not understand the children. Young Bedouin girls worked in the kindergarten as helpers and acted as interpreters. The Arabian teachers were not familiar with the Bedouin habits and customs, which are much different from their own and after two years in the Negev, when they finally adapted themselves to the place and knew the customs and dialect, they asked to be transferred to places near their home villages. These problems and many absences from work, made it difficult to maintain a high level of kindergarten education.

The school directors, who were responsible for the kindergartens were aware of these problems and decided to do something about them. When, on a typical stormy desert day, Dr. Nehama Nir came to visit the Bedouin kindergarten, two to the directors suggested that the Bedouin girls who acted as helpers and who often substituted for the teachers when they were absent, be trained in a special course so that they could teach the children themselves. The Bedouin girls knew the children, they understood the children's language, they were highly motivated, and they would not leave the area.

Dr. Nir was enthusiastic about the idea for it provided a temporary answer to a burning problem. With her most active help, her pressure, and persuasion dissolved many bureaucratic technicalities and the special course was begun with myself as the tutor.

It was not easy to persuade the Bedouin fathers to send their daughters to Beer-Sheva for the course. I spoke with a Sheik whose two daughters wanted to take the course and told him that if he would give his permission he would set a most important example for the other fathers. The Sheik agreed--and I was able to use his name to convince other Bedouin fathers--but only on the conditions that I would be responsible for the girls and that no males would teach them. We found a nice quiet place and the fathers and brothers who came at the beginning to see if everything was under control were satisfied.

The teachers (all women, of course) and I did not know on what level the course would be conducted. Fortunately, five Bedouin young ladies who had graduated from high school joined the course and the level of study naturally rose. The students came twice a week for four hours each day. We began last year with enriching Arabic language, Arabic literature, and Moslem culture taught by an Arabian teacher. There were also lessons in Hebrew language, geography, psychology (T-group), and kindergarten theory and methodology.

At the beginning the girls were very shy but gradually they began to feel at ease and to know one another. They came from different Bedouin tribes which had very few relations with one another, but after a few months, they began to feel like a real group. We encouraged them to ask and say whatever they wanted to. Eventually these girls, who at first were very suspicious of us, began to have confidence in our good intentions.

In addition to the formal lessons, we went several times to observe kindergartens in Beer-Sheva where we were very well accepted by all the children

and staff. Afterwards, I saw that the Bedouin young ladies applied what they had seen during these observations in their own kindergarten classrooms. In the summer there were ten days of continuing courses, including handicraft lessons and gymnastics and outdoor games.

At the end of the first year we asked the students what they thought about the course: did they like it? was the material difficult for them to understand? were they satisfied with their teachers? One student wrote: "I am very happy that I am in this course because if I did not have the opportunity to be here, who knows, maybe not in ten years, maybe never, would I have the chance to go out and learn." Another student wrote: "I can not accept the idea about the differences between Jews and Arabs. I heard that Jews didn't like Arabs but after the Jewish teachers have taught us I don't see any differences."

This second year we received a few more girls who heard about the course and wanted to join us. Today we have twenty five students. Since the Education office was short in kindergarten teachers from the North the five high school graduates are already working as kindergarten teachers. The others are continuing as helpers or are coming at least twice a week to the kindergartens to observe, so all the students have the opportunity for practical experience in the kindergarten classroom. The second year lessons are on a higher level than last year's and we require more homework in hygiene, citizenship, science, psychology, and educational theory and methodology. At the end of this second--and last--year the students will take examinations and only those who pass successfully will be able to receive work as kindergarten teachers, though, they will be asked to continue their studies until full graduation.

This course is, of course, a temporary solution. In the future we hope that Bedouin girls who graduate from high school will enroll in a regular Seminar for educators as a group of their own. The goal is for Bedouin kindergarten children to some day have their own educators who will know their language, dialect, customs, and habits, and who will remain in the Negev.